

Okinawa Protests Explode

Friday 9 November 2012, by [Gathering of Kamaduu gua](#), [McCORMACK Gavan](#), [Ryukyu Shimpō](#) (Date first published: 7 October 2012).

The Ospreys have arrived. On October 1- 2, 9 of the MV-22 Osprey vertical take-off and landing aircraft were deployed to Futenma. Locals argue that the aircraft, which has a dubious safety record that has earned it the ominous nickname “The Widow Maker”, is an unacceptable crash risk that threatens the civilian population and natural environment.

The following video from Japan’s *Asahi* Television (Japanese language) contains English commentary on some of the aircraft’s flaws [see the original article]:

Okinawa, host to 75% of the American military facilities in Japan despite making up only 0.6% of the country’s land mass, is currently in the throes of some of the largest protests that the prefecture has ever seen. *Ryukyu Shimpō* offers a snapshot of one protest:

Citizen group sit-in block gates to U.S. Futenma base

September 28, 2012 *Ryukyu Shimpō*

<http://english.ryukyushimpo.jp/2012/10/03/8231/>

At around 10:10am on September 28, in front of the Oyama gate of U.S. Marine Corps Futenma Air Station in Ginowan, police forcefully remove sit-in protesters seeking the withdrawal of the Osprey aircraft.

From 9:00am on September 28, in front of the Oyama gate of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, about 100 people from civil groups such as the Okinawa Peace Movement Center and labor unions held a rally to protest against the deployment of MV-22 Osprey vertical take-off and landing transport aircraft. The people sat in front of the gate and halted all vehicle traffic in and out of the base for a short time. They got into a shoving match with the police, and at about 11:20am a woman in her 60s was taken away in an ambulance in a confused state. The extent of her injury is unknown at this time.

As of noon, protesters were still sitting in front of the gate. Around 10:30am, Marines closed the Oyama gate of the base. The gates of the Futenma Air Station were blocked by the protest in two places, including the Nodake gate, in the afternoon of September 27. The Marines secured their inbound and outbound traffic through the gate at Samashita.

From 7:00am on September 28, in front of the Nodake gate, the executive committee that organized the Okinawan People Mass Rally on September 9 in Ginowan, held a protest rally. About 300 people, including members of the Diet, prefectural government assembly, and mayors of cities, towns, villages, as well as citizens participated in the rally, demanding that the governments of Japan and the United States abandon the Osprey deployment.

Nago City mayor Susumu Inamine said, “We will not permit the deployment of the Osprey to Futenma Air Station. As was the case in the San Francisco Peace Treaty, the Government of Japan is

once again about to detach Okinawa from Japan for the security of the main islands. With this can Japan call itself a democracy, or an independent state? Let's put up a struggle for democracy from Okinawa, and make the Japanese government open its eyes to the situation."

(English translation by T&CT, Mark Ealey)

Gavan McComack, author (with Satoko Norimatsu) of Resistant Islands - Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States (Rowman and Littlefield, 2012) and an Asia-Pacific Journal Coordinator, puts these circumstances into perspective:

What we are now witnessing is the mask of legitimacy dropping decisively and irrecoverably from the joint US-Japan control system, exposing the sheer violence and hostility for the Okinawan people that is its essence.

The system may recover, in the first instance, because the two states have the monopoly on violence, and maybe the Osprey will continue to fly in Okinawan skies; but the facade has gone, beyond restoration.

Okinawa is under enemy occupation. It has long been so, but the fabric of legitimacy and consent was always there, however thinly stretched. Now it is gone. And, as the Okinawan media note, events are mutating: the focus is gradually widening from Osprey to Futenma and to the base system itself.

In Eastern Europe back in '89 there was a point of no return. It was passed. Hollowed out, the system soon collapsed, but nobody realized till Berliners actually took to the wall. The live links from Futenma are all but unbearable to watch. But it is our history. It is the lone protester in Tiananmen for our times. The citizens of a core region of the democratic world are rising and the world does not want to know.

To our Brothers and Sisters in the US Marines

One of the most moving perspectives on the Osprey controversy and the larger issue of the US base presence in Okinawa comes from of a letter "To Our Brothers and Sisters in the US Marines" from the local protest group Gathering of Kamaduu gua (カマドゥグア). Satoko Norimatsu of Peace Philosophy Center [1] presents the protest letter's context:

On October 1, six MV-22 Ospreys were flown into MCAS Futenma, and three more on the following day (see New York Times report by Martin Fackler), despite the all-island opposition against their deployment to the Marine base in the middle of the crowded neighbourhood of Ginowan. Back in 1996, sixteen years ago, US and Japanese governments made a promise to Okinawans to return it within several years. Today, the two governments have not only not returned it, but have reinforced the base with these bigger, faster, noisier and accident-prone aircraft, sending a clear message to local residents that this base would stay for a while. Many Okinawans view this as a punitive measure for their opposition against the plan to build a new mega-base at Henoko, Oura Bay, and it is simply unacceptable. Here is a message from an Okinawan women's group "Gathering of

Kamadu u gua," to the members of the US Marine Corps, with hope that it will speak to the conscience of the women and men who will be exposing not only Okinawan residents but themselves to danger. Author chinin usii, a member of the group says, "Okinawans oppose the MV-22 Osprey, not just because they are dangerous. We are also expressing our anger against the denial of our lives, our dignity, and our democracy, throughout history, and we are also voicing our determination so that such treatment of our people will not be repeated. If we allow this, we will be allowing such injustice to be inflicted on our children and grandchildren, and people in other regions of the world."

To our Brothers and Sisters in the US Marines,

When you joined the Marines, maybe you thought you could help propagate, or protect, democracy in the world.

Now is a good time to think about democracy in Okinawa.

On the question of whether to bring the Osprey to Okinawa, do we Okinawans have a right to participate in that decision? After all, this is our island, and the sky over it, which the Osprey will be flying through, also belongs to us. Would it be democratic for the US and Japan to decide to bring it in, ignoring the Okinawans?

Of course, it would not.

We Okinawans have expressed our opposition in every peaceful way possible. 100,000 people gathered at an anti-Osprey rally (out of a population of 1,400,000) on September 9. The conservative Governor of the prefecture is against it. The Prefectural Assembly is against it. The conservative Mayors of both Naha City and Ginowan City are against it. The local government of every other city, town, and village in Okinawa is against it. Both local newspapers are against it. Even the PTA is against it. To ignore all this and bring it in anyway would be to insult the Okinawan people in a way that would never be forgotten.

Why do we oppose it? Because it is dangerous. It crashes too often. It has killed far too many Marines. Everybody knows this; Osprey is a notoriously flawed aircraft. It was not we who named it the Widow Maker. Yes, it is sometimes an airplane and sometimes a helicopter. That's very clever. But sometimes it is neither. Then it becomes a big blob of metal in the sky, which can only fall to the ground. Not clever at all. We don't want it falling on us, and we don't want it falling with you in it.

As for the danger of the Osprey, we suppose you know all about that. And we think, perhaps, on this issue we can join forces. And so we ask you, in the name of democracy, in the name of our dignity and yours, in the name of our safety and yours: join us in opposing the Osprey.

Don't get in it, don't fly it, don't service it, don't go near it. Treat it like the death trap that it is.

When you joined the Marines, you probably wanted to do something for democracy and for the dignity of human life.

Now's your chance.

Your Brothers and Sisters in Okinawa

P.S.

* Asia-Pacific Journal Feature. <http://japanfocus.org/events/view/159>

Footnotes

[1] <http://peacephilosophy.blogspot.ca/2012/10/to-our-brothers-and-sisters-in-us.html>